WASHTENAW COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY - Founded December 17, 1857 NOV.-DEC. 1985

WASHTENAW IMPRESSIONS

PRESIDENT'S CORNER

By Galen R. Wilson

On Thursday, November 14, the Washtenaw County Historical Society will hold a very important general meeting. We hope to be entertained with selections of early Washtenaw County music—sheet music known to have been played on Ann Arbor's first piano. Plans are not yet final at this writing, but two things are promised. we *will* have entertainment, and your President will *not* presume to perform, unlike last May.

The Long-Range Planning Committee, appointed at the annual dinner in May, will bring its report and recommendations to the membership. The question at hand is whether the Society will move ahead with a concerted effort to acquire a building—be it for office space, for museum purposes, or for a combination. The Committee will present both sides of the issue, just as we have done in committee meetings, playing devil's advocate to each other. The membership will be asked to vote on a "direction": shall we act, or shall we not?

Alice Ziegler has dug deep into the Society's history and will present at the meeting a summary of her findings. A constant thread runs through the chronology: since its beginning, the Society has endeavored to find a "home." The chronicle of missed opportunities can be disheartening, if dwelled upon (the spilt milk syndrome), but is better considered as a challenge. We cannot change the past—cannot go back and redeem a chance that went by untapped. But we do have today. And what we do today will affect the kind of Society we are tomorrow.

It is no secret how I hope the vote will go. But I am a newcomer to the Society and many of you have been involved in our organization since I was in grade school. It is my hope that as many of you as possible will attend the potluck dinner and the business meeting afterwards, and that you will feel free to express your opinions.

WCHS TO DISCUSS GOALS, PRIORITIES, HEAR MUSIC FROM PIONEER ANN ARBOR AT NOVEMBER 14 POTLUCK

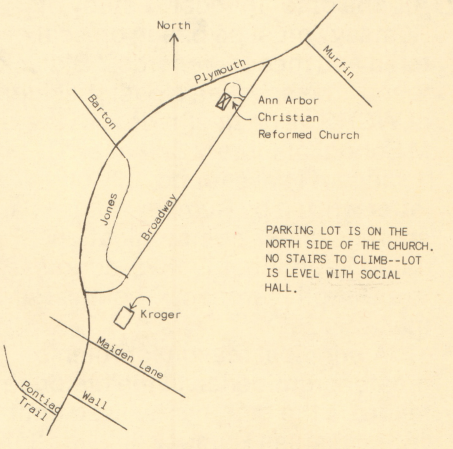
The WCHS fall potluck at 6:30 p.m. Thursday, November 14, at the Christian Reformed Church, 1717 Broadway (see map), will feature discussion of Society goals and priorities and music you might have heard here 150 years ago.

A long-range planning committee has been meeting in recent months to review Society history and consider whether the Society should seek a museum/office/home or just involve itself in other activities. The Committee will report and asks member input.

A pianist has been engaged to play from sheet music of Lucy Ann Clark (the young lady who would not come to Ann Arbor in 1827 without her piano), and of her daughter, Frances Kingsley. The sheet music is in the Clements Library collection.

Please answer the simple survey question in coupon on page 7 and bring or mail it together with your comments.

Those attending are asked to bring their own table service and a dish to pass serving 8-10. Beverages will be furnished.



KEMPF HOUSE PLANS CAROLING PARTY

Christmas caroling is planned at 7:30 p.m .Saturday, December 14, at Kempf House, followed by outdoor caroling through the nearby historic district at 8:30 and back to Kempf House for refreshments at 9:30. Those attending are asked to donate a Christmas tree ornament. A modest fee will be charged.

Plans for Cobblestone Farm Christmas observance December 14-15 were not yet firm and will be announced later.

WCHS 1986 CALENDARS. GREAT CHRISTMAS GIFTS

WCHS's 1986 calendars featuring drawings of historic buildings around the county by Bill Shurtliff, on sale at several locations, would make great Christmas gifts for friends and relatives here or away and don't forget one for yourself.

To obtain calendars call President Galen Wilson at 764-2347 (office hours), WCHS (Kempf House) 996-3008, or Vice-President Esther Warzynski 662-6275. They are $6 to members, $7 to the public or by mail. Send check or money order to WCHS calendar, Clements Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI 48109.

WCHS CHRISTMAS PARTY SUNDAY, DECEMBER 8

The Westminster Presbyterian Church children's handbell choir will entertain at the WCHS Christmas party at 2:30 p.m. Sunday, December 8, at Clements Library, 909 South University.

The library will display Christmas materials from its collections of early American history. Toys from the WCHS collection will be under the Christmas tree.

Punch and cookies will be served. Everyone is welcome. President Galen Wilson has arranged with city authorities for parking to be allowed on the north side of South University between State and East University that afternoon.

COOKIES NEEDED, PLEASE

Attention, WCHS members. Will you please share some of your favorite holiday cookies at the WCHS Christmas party December 8?

If so, please call Louisa Pieper, 996-3008, or Kathy Sutton, 994-5196 (home) or 665-4081 (office), co-chairmen of refreshments, so they can plan on them. Thanks.

RUSSELL E. BIDLACK DISCUSSES

SHORT, TROUBLED LIVES OF ELISHA AND MARY ANN RUMSEY

Ann Arbor co-founder Elisha Walker Rumsey was born exactly two hundred years ago on November 24 this year.

"Since he became the proprietor of Ann Arbor's first tavern, which he called the Wastenaw Coffee House," Russell E. Bidlack, October speaker, suggested a toast on the 24th "or perhaps simply lifting a cup of coffee to his memory will constitute an appropriate observance of his 200th birthday."

Unlike a study of John Allen, Ann Arbor's other founder, a study of Rumsey "must be based on scattered and meager records," Bidlack found. The speaker, a past president of WCHS, is dean-emeritus of the U-M School of Library Science.

"In fact I have found only one letter written by Rumsey—this is a short business communication dated September 7, 1825, addressed to a Detroit merchant, Thomas Palmer.

"A principal reason for Allen's greater prominence in the historical record is the fact that he lived until 1851, whereas Rumsey died in 1827. There are other reasons, however.

"I contend that John Allen was, from the start, the leader in founding our town, and, furthermore, that Allen sought the public eye. Starting a town was, for John Allen, but a stepping stone toward greater things."

"Elisha Rumsey, eleven years Allen's senior, was, on the other hand, looking for financial security in Michigan territory, along with a degree of quietude.

"Whereas John Allen sought public office, even aspiring to become governor at one point, Rumsey was content to be a justice of the peace and captain of the local militia.

"Furthermore, Rumsey had reason to avoid the public gaze when he came to Michigan Territory in 1824. He had but recently gained release from jail in Albany following his apprehension and arrest for embezzlement.

"In the words of a friend in Genesee County, New York, the reason Rumsey 'pulled up and went to Michigan' was because 'public opinion was so strong against both him and his wife.'

Photo by Esther Warzynski

Elisha Rumsey's Grave in Forest Hill Cemetery

"Rumsey had been known to his friends back in Genesee County by his middle name, Walker, but when he came to Michigan he preferred to be known as Elisha. A contemporary suggested that 'by dropping the name *Walker,* which was in bad repute in New York, and assuming the name *Elisha,* he got out from under a cloud and had a clear sky in Michigan.'

"So far as we know, Rumsey's portrait was never painted, and, of course, he died long before the invention of photography. I have found no description of his physical appearance.

"John Allen had his portrait painted twice, and a number of his contemporaries made written note of his handsome appearance and his commanding stature—6 feet, 2 inches. We even have a phrenologist's description of the contours of John Allen's head."

"Like John Allen, Elisha W. Rumsey came from an old and distinguished family. Here I must acknowledge the spendid assistance provided by Jean Rumsey of Lombard, Illinois. Miss Rumsey is *the* authority on the Rumsey family in America, from Robert Rumsey who settled in Fairfield, Connecticut, in 1664, to the present day. Miss Rumsey descends from an uncle of Elisha Walker Rumsey.

"While limited data make the telling of Elisha's story difficult, our task is even harder in tracing the history of Mary Ann Rumsey. Whereas many of Mrs. Allen's letters survive, including one in which she recalled her childhood for an inquiring nephew, Mrs. Rumsey left only her occasional signature on deeds executed by her husband.

"I have not even succeeded in learning her maiden name, her place of birth, nor the exact date of her birth, although we know that she was 47 years old when she died in 1849 and, according to the sexton's records, she was born in Massachusetts.

"Even in her own time, there was an air of mystery about Mary Ann Rumsey. Ann Arbor's first historian, Mary H. Clark, after interviewing several people who had known Mary Ann, wrote in 1852 that 'little was known of her story, for she never showed herself inclined to be communicative on the subject.' "

William Rumsey, Elisha's father, was of the fourth generation of Rumseys to reside in Fairfield, Connecticut. Born in 1750, he had served the cause of American freedom during five different enlistments in the Revolutionary War.

In 1832 when Congress authorized pensions for all living Revolutionary veterans regardless of their financial situation, 82-year-old William Rumsey applied for and received a pension equivalent to what had been his army pay sixty years earlier—$82.66 per year.

"In his pension application, William Rumsey indicated that, after the war, he had moved some 75 miles north of Fairfield to the village of Sharon in Litchfield County, Connecticut. He was married in July 1783 to Elizabeth Walker, daughter of Elisha and Isabel (Ward) Walker.

"It was in Sharon that their first child, Henry Rumsey, was born on July 7, 1784. The following year, on November 24, 1785, their second child was born and was named for his mother's father, Elisha Walker. A third child, Charlotte Rumsey, was also born in Sharon in June 1787.

"Later that year, or perhaps it was in 1788, William Rumsey followed a number of his relatives to a new

frontier in what was then the independent state of Vermont. The family settled near the village of Hubbardton in Rutland County where, by 1805, eight more children had been added to the Rumsey household.

"It was near Hubbardton, some fifteen miles from the New York border, that Elisha Walker Rumsey grew to manhood. He was five years old when Vermont joined the Union as the 14th state.

"Nothing is known of his childhood, nor of his schooling. Elisha's education was probably that of the 'common school.' The fact that Governor Cass appointed him a justice of the peace in Michigan Territory may suggest that he had received some sort of legal training.

"Sometime during 1810, at age 25, he was married in the village of Georgia, in Franklin County, Vermont, to Olive Churchill, a daughter of Janna and Sara (Mix) (Foster) Churchill, who was about three years his junior. Located only twenty odd miles from Vermont's border with Quebec, Georgia was his wife's home.

"Elisha brought Olive to his home in Hubbardton and it was there that their first child, William Churchill Rumsey, was born on May 10, 1811. Their second child, born June 13, 1813, was named Royal Churchill. He was born in Hubbardton as was their third child, a daughter, Emily Lucy, born on October 10, 1815.

"By the time their fourth child arrived on November 23, 1818 (he was named Charles Walker Rumsey), Elisha and Olive had moved their family to the town(ship) of Bethany and settled at East Bethany in Genesee County, New York, located forty miles stright east of Buffalo.

"There was a fifth child, Henry Josiah, born June 13, 1820. A month and a half later, on August 1, 1820, Olive died, leaving Elisha with five children, all under the age of ten.

"The Rumseys' trek from Vermont to Genesee County, New York, had come toward the end of the great migration of New Englanders 'to the westward' that had begun toward the end of the 18th centry.

"Elisha's older brother, Henry, had gone to Genesee County in 1806. In 1809, both Henry Rumsey and his sister Charlotte's husband, Josiah Churchill, had purchased land there from the Holland Land Company for which Elisha's Uncle William had been a surveyor as early as 1800.

"It was stated by a contemporary of Elisha's that he was in Genesee County by 1817, but our earliest record of his purchasing land there was in December 1818. Rumsey was now 33 years old.

"According to G.M. Peck writing from East Bethany in 1881, Walker Rumsey (as he called Elisha) 'lived in a log house on the Joel Miner farm, near the "poppe tree" on the ridge south of the road.'

"Peck went on to explain that 'an old Indian (had) stuck a cane, cut from a limb of a poplar tree, into the ground at this place, and it grew into this tree.'

"The Rumsey's log house burned within a year or two of their arrival, and Elisha and Olive had moved to a place called 'the Corners' and it was there that Olive died in 1820. She was buried with Churchill relatives in the Baptist Church cemetery at Bethany Center.

"A friend of Rumsey's, a Bethany resident named Rodney Taylor, recalled Rumsey's enterprising nature in an interview in 1880. During his first year in Bethany, Rumsey had purchased wheat at 31 cents a bushel, had it floured, and then hauled it to Albany (a distance of 250 miles) with a six-horse team.

"His financial success in this venture led him to try another—he purchased hogs in the winter of 1818-19, and with the help of young Rodney Taylor, butchered them, cut up and packed the meat, and again took his product to Albany.

"There he sold the pork to a man named John Trotter who had started a meat-packing operation in Albany. Trotter was so pleased with Rumsey's pork that he offered him the opportunity to help supply him with beef. Trotter even loaned Rumsey $3,000 in cash to purchase cattle toward this end.

"It was Rumsey's subsequent embezzlement of this $3,000 that led to both his financial ruin and, coupled with his infatuation with a 'grass widow' named Mary Ann Sprague, his eventual quest for a new life in Michigan Territory.

"This episode in Rumsey's life is best told by quoting from a letter penned on February 11, 1881, by G.M. Peck of East Bethany, New York, to T.B. Lord in Comstock, Michigan.

"While Peck had known Rumsey well, he acknowledged that much of his information had come from Rodney Taylor, then in his eightieth year, who had assisted Rumsey with the packing and shipping of the pork to Albany."

Peck wrote, "He (Rumsey) advertised for the farmers to bring in their cattle on specified days at the center of Bethany and Stafford, but *he* failed to appear. Some time before this his wife and he had become acquainted with Ann Sprague, a grass widow of prepossessing attractions.

"Now, Rumsey, after receiving the $3,000, went with Ann Sprague to Canada with his pockets full of money. After getting there he found, if caught in that country it would be worse for him than if caught in the states, hence, *he now starts for Michigan.*

"A young lawyer in Batavia (the county seat of Genesee County) got wind of his movements, and went to Albany. Trotter came back with him, and they pursued and found Rumsey in Michigan, and took him to Albany, leaving Ann in old Gen. Isaiah Churchill's home.

"On reaching Albany the matter was personally arranged, and Rumsey came back to Bethany. Soon after this he was rearrested, taken to Albany, and locked up again.

"Esquire Churchill went to Albany, and Rumsey, who owned the Taylor farm at the time, turned that out, which, with Churchill's security, released him. After this he lived with Ann Sprague as his wife.

"Public opinion was so strong against both him and his wife that they *pulled up and went to Michigan,"* Peck wrote.

"While G.M. Peck has given us an interesting account, he failed to provide a most important detail—the date of the events described. The implication is that Trotter loaned Rumsey the $3,000 soon after receiving his pork in the winter of 1818-19, but this could well have been later.

"Whether Rumsey's embezzlement and elopement with Mary Ann occurred before or after August 1,

1820, the date of Olive Rumsey's death, must affect our moral judgement of his act, but that determination remains for future research.

"The deed conveying Rumsey's 117-acre farm to John Trotter was dated October 11, 1823. The farm was valued at $2,340, but Patience Kingsley held a $900 mortgage on it dating from 1820.

"Mary Ann signed the 1823 deed and relinquished her dower right as Rumsey's wife in the usual manner of the time. No record of the actual marriage of Elisha and Mary Ann has been found.

"We have a number of contemporary references to Mary Ann's beauty as well as her charming personality. Rodney Taylor recalled that 'Ann Sprague was a smart, fine looking woman.' He knew her well because she had lived in his home at one time and had cared for his wife 'while she was sick with the dropsy.'

"It is possible that it was in the Taylor home that Rumsey became acquainted with Mary Ann. Mary H. Clark, in her sketch of Mary Ann for *Godey's Magazine and Lady's Book* from which I quoted earlier, noted that 'all contemporaries of Mrs. Rumsey agree in describing her as a woman of remarkable and distinguished appearance, and of energetic character...

Her cheerful disposition, disregard of hardships, and resolute way of "making the best of everything," have often been mentioned with admiration.'

"The exact date on which Elisha and Mary Ann left Genesee County, New York to find a home in Michigan Territory, is not known, but it was in the late fall or early winter of 1823.

"It was customary for Michigan pioneers to wait until after the harvest season to begin the journey. The husband usually came by himself to select and purchase a tract of land and build a log cabin. He would then return for his wife and family and be back in time to plant his first crop in the spring.

"It was somewhat unusual that Mary Ann should accompany Elisha, although the circumstance of their departure from Genesee County probably accounts for this. Furthermore, Mary Ann had become pregnant during the spring of 1823 and her baby was expected in February.

"Rumsey left his five children with relatives in Genesee County. Although four of them would later come to Michigan, Elisha did not live to see any of them again.

"We can only speculate regarding Elisha's and Mary Ann's plans for establishing a new home in Michigan Territory. The fact that they had been in Michigan Territory earlier, probably either in Wayne or Monroe County, meant that they had greater knowledge than did most immigrants regarding the Territory.

"Furthermore, Rumsey had doubtless read issues of the *Detroit Gazette,* a newspaper that had been published weekly since 1817. A principal goal of its editor, John P. Sheldon, was to use the pages of his paper to attract settlers to Michigan. He exchanged his paper freely with printers in western New York, urging that they reprint in their own papers his laudatory descriptions of Michigan.

"We have no direct knowledge of Rumsey's financial resources when he and Mary Ann left Genesee County. Those resources must have been slight after his settlement with John Trotter. A possible answer to this question is found in the papers settling Rumsey's estate following his death in Ann Arbor in 1827.

"His debts were then over $2,000, the largest of which was to his father, William Rumsey, back in Hubbardton, Vermont—a total of $527.80. He also owed his brother, William H. Rumsey, $56.

"We can speculate that he came to Michigan in the winter of 1823-24 on money borrowed from his family. To understand the size of these debts it is helpful to note that the customary wage for a day's manual labor was $1 in 1824. A U.S. Congressman received $8 per day.

"From extant letters written by friends he had made in Buffalo, we know that (Allen) had traveled by land through Canada, reaching Detroit sometime prior to January 27, 1824. It was in Detroit that John Allen, age 27, and Elisha Rumsey, age 39, met for the first time.

"While there was considerable difference in ages of the two men, and although their backgrounds were quite different, Rumsey, the New Englander and Allen the Virginian, had something in common. Each was running away from his past.

"Allen was attempting to escape the encumbrance of his father's debts which he had once assumed in a vain attempt to save the family's plantation.

"Ironically, Allen had, like Rumsey, taken cattle money that had not belonged to him; the payment that he had received in Baltimore for the cattle that he had driven to market was owed to creditors back in Virginia.

" 'Absconded' was the word used by the Augusta County tax collector in 1824 to describe Allen's departure from Virginia.

"It had been Allen's intention to use the cattle money to purchase land and lay out a town, from which he would then get rich selling lots; he would then pay back his debts.

"To his Aunt Jane Trimble, Allen explained in 1825, 'the day is not far distant, in the which I shall be able to prove to the world that I only detained from them a few pence to enable me to pay them the pounds.' He did, in fact, repay them, Bidlack said.

"Allen had expected to go from Detroit to somewhere in Ohio to found his town, but while in Detroit he decided to explore Michigan Territory first.

"There can be little doubt that one of those who spoke on behalf of Michigan was Allen's new friend, Elisha Walker Rumsey. The two men agreed to pool their resources and to establish a town together.

"Allen and Rumsey could not have chosen a more propitious time in Michigan's history to purchase land and found a town. Until 1824, settlement in the Territory had been extremely slow, largely because of disparaging reports made by several prominent visitors and soldiers following the War of 1812.

"There were also persistent reports that Michigan Territory was unhealthy. These were based largely on the death rate among soldiers stationed in the Territory. In 1823, for example, so many died who were stationed at Fort Saginaw that the post had to be abandoned.

"Major Daniel Baker, the fort's commander, declared that 'only Indians, muskrats and bullfrogs can live in Michigan.'

"A rhyme even circulated in the east that discouraged settlement.

'Don't go to Michigan,
that land of ills,
The word means ague, fever,
and chills.'

"It was to counter these negative reports that in his weekly *Gazette* John Sheldon so frequently praised Michigan's fertile soil and proclaimed the settlers' enjoyment of good health.

"The Territory's brightest hope, however, lay in the nearing completion of the Erie Canal. While this would not materialize until the following year, 1825, few doubted that there would follow a veritable flood of emigrants to Detroit and from there westward.

"There are numerous records testifying to the remarkably mild weather that Michigan experienced during the winter of 1823-24, the very time of the Rumsey's and Allen's arrival. We suspect that men like Sheldon assured the emigrants that it was a typical Michigan winter.

"An officer with the Detroit garrison kept a daily weather 'diary' from January through March, 1824. He recorded the coldest day as February 5th when the mercury stood at 4 degrees, but on January 11th it had reached 63 degrees and on February 20th, 66 degrees. There had been only one day of snow in January and five during February.

"Apparently, Allen and Rumsey went 'land hunting' only in Washtenaw County. Prior to 1822, only five counties had been established in the Territory (Wayne, Monroe, Macomb, Oakland and St. Clair) but on September 9, 1822, Washtenaw had been created, along with Lapeer, Sanilac, Saginaw, Shiawassee and Lenawee.

"None of these new counties was then 'organized,' however, each being attached to one of the older counties until its population was sufficient to justify county government. Washtenaw was attached to Wayne, and would so remain until 1827.

"We can be certain that Allen, accompanied by Rumsey, called upon the Territorial Governor, Lewis Cass, before setting out to explore.

"While still in Buffalo, Allen had received a letter from Micajah T. Williams, a prominent land owner and speculator in Ohio, advising him that 'Gov. Cass and Col. Hunt, at Detroit will be glad to afford you all information they can—I would advise you to call on them without ceremony.'

"It is possible that Governor Cass may even have mentioned to Allen and Rumsey the beautiful oak opening along the Huron. The Governor, at the close of the 4,200 mile exploring expedition of Michigan Territory in 1820, had ridden horseback from Fort Dearborn (later Chicago) back to Detroit along the old Sauk Trail (now US-12), so he was personally familiar with the area.

"Allen and Rumsey also learned that, besides an old French trading post on the Huron River, an actual settlement, numbering five or six cabins had come into existence in Washtenaw County the previous year.

"Benjamin Woodruff from Sandusky, Ohio, had purchased 114 acres of government land on April 22, 1823, in what would someday be included in Ypsilanti Township, and by July he had completed his cabin. It stood about a mile southeast of today's central business district of Ypsilanti.

"Two other men had come to assist Woodruff, Leonard Miller, David Beverly and during the course of the summer and fall, Daniel Cross, Robert Stitt, and a man named Peck had joined Woodruff. Then late that autumn, John Bryan arrived with his wife and five children from Livingston County, New York.

"The autobiographical sketch of John Bryan written in 1854, provides us with a delightful glimpse of Allen and Rumsey as they set out land hunting. Bryan, having finished his cabin and providing his family with a supply of meat, found himself desperately in need of some cash.

"He had heard that there was work for carpenters in Detroit and so on February 1, 1824, leaving his pregnant wife under the watchful care of Mrs. Woodruff, he set out on foot for Detroit.

"One of the few snowstorms of the winter had occurred the night before, and Bryan remembered following the old Sauk Trail 'through an unbroken snow six inches deep.' About half way to Detroit he met two men in a one-horse sleigh.

" 'After inquiring if I thought they could reach the settlement (Woodruff's Grove) before dark, they said they were going to find a place for a future home, and asked many questions about the country. They proved to be Messrs. Allen and Rumsey, who afterwards were the founders of Ann Arbor.'

"We know that Allen and Rumsey did, indeed, reach Woodruff's Grove where they were taken in for the night, probably by Ben Woodruff himself. Daniel Cross agreed to help them explore and recalled many years later that he spent 'three days in the woods with them looking for land, and that (the oak opening they chose) was the first spot that seemed to suit them.'

" 'They then went to Detroit and located their land, and we all turned out and helped to build their homes.' It is quite possible that Rumsey and Daniel Cross were already acquainted, both were from Genesee County, New York.

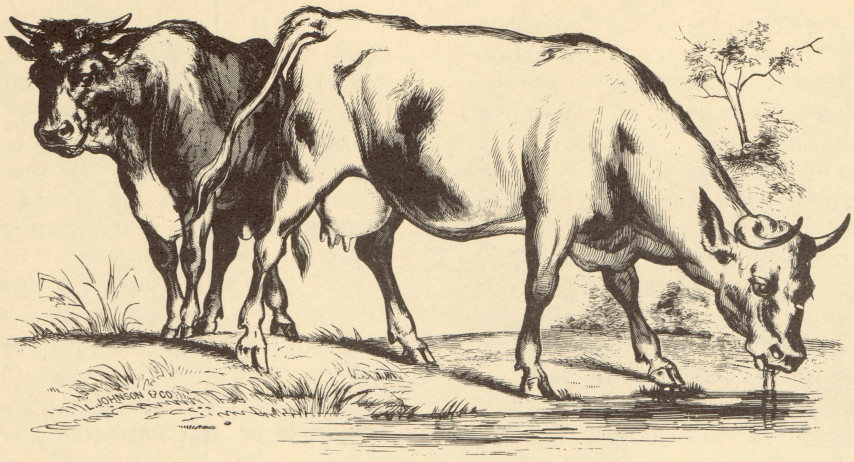
"By February 12, a Thursday, the two pioneers were back in Detroit where they registered their claims with the Land Office, purchasing all of Section 29 in Township 2 (later Ann Arbor township).

"Allen's share was three times that of Rumsey's, however. While Rumsey paid $200 for 160 acres, Allen paid $600 for 480 acres. Together they also bought a 40-acre plot on the Huron River in Section 21 where the Fuller Recreation Center is now located, this, they thought would make an excellent mill site.

"There can be little doubt that Allen and Rumsey promptly reported their purchases to Governor Cass because, just two days later, on February 14, 1824, the Governor appointed a commission 'to explore the County of Washtenaw, and to establish the county seat thereof.'

"Noting that such action 'would have a powerful effect in promoting emigration to that part of the Territory,' Cass added. "Independently of my own views upon this subject, application has recently been made to me by persons interested in the County for the establishment of the County seat.'

"This 'application' must surely have come from Allen and Rumsey, for nothing could assure their success more than to have their pro-



posed village be designated the seat of justice for Washtenaw County.

"Although the Governor invited seven prominent Detroiters to serve as commissioners (John L. Lieb, Austin E. Wing, James McCloskey, Thomas Rowland, Richard Smyth, Thomas C. Sheldon and Shubael Conant), he indicated that any three of them would be sufficient for the task.

"All except Lieb, however, went and by the end of the month had accomplished their task. It happened that John Bryan, who had met Allen and Rumsey on his way to Detroit on February 1st, now met the commissioners on his way back to Woodruff's Grove on the 20th.

" 'They were on horseback, all were dressed in Indian blanket overcoats, and had their pantaloons seated and faced down in front with buckskin. Each had a tin cup.

" 'On enquiring "What news?" James McCloskey, Esq., who knew me, replied that they had located the county seat on land recently purchased by Allen and Rumsey, about 10 miles up the Huron from our settlement.' "

While Bryan recalled this thirty years after, "his memory was aided by the fact that the commissioners brought him important personal news from Woodruff's Grove—his wife had given birth to a baby boy the day before. That baby, named Alpha Washtenaw Bryan, had the distinction of being the first white child born in Washtenaw County to survive infancy.

"While the commissioners made no note of a name for Allen's and Rumsey's proposed village, they did mention having received a 'plan and description.' They also referred specifically to 'Allen's Creek which takes its name from one of the proprietors of the county.'

"According to Henry Goodell, writing in 1873, an Indian trail followed the right bank of Allen's Creek.

"While gaining the county seat virtually assured success for their venture, Allen and Rumsey had to pay a price. The commissioners stipulated that they contribute 'in cash, in labor and materials, toward the erection of a courthouse and gaol, and the erection of a substantial bridge over the Huron, the amount of one thousand dollars. and that they further give to the county such lots and parcels of ground, as the undersigned have deemed necessary for public uses.' "

Mary Ann Rumsey had remained in Detroit while Allen and Rumsey were land hunting. "While at Woodruff's Grove, Rumsey had apparently arranged for her to come there and stay until a cabin could be built on the land he had purchased.

"Sometime during the latter half of February, 1824, according to Rumsey family records, Mary Ann was delivered of a baby girl at Woodruff's Grove. Named Caroline Strong Rumsey, the baby died, either at birth or shortly thereafter. (Whether the name chosen may contain a clue regarding Mary Ann's family has yet to be determined.)

"In all probability, it was Mrs. Woodruff, long remembered by the early settlers for her nursing skills, who served as midwife and who cared for Mary Ann following the baby's birth and death.

"It must have been the death of little Caroline that was remembered by the people whom Mary Clark interviewed before writing her sketch of Mary Ann in 1852, '...it did not appear that she suffered her thoughts to dwell on the past, though once, in a moment of great distress on the occasion of a sudden death of a beloved child, she let fall expressions which set afloat the conjectures of her neighbors and awakened curiosity which was never fully satisfied.'

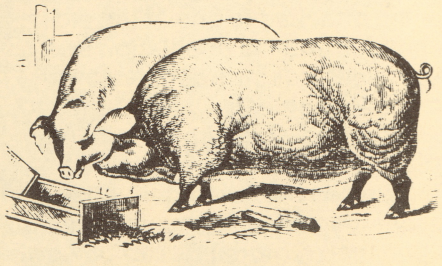
"In their report, the commissioners stated that Allen and Rumsey 'have already, under almost every disadvantage, erected a good framed house, are commencing large improvements, and have contributed liberally for the benefit of the public.'

"For Allen and Rumsey to have 'erected a good framed house,' during the last two weeks of February seems almost impossible, and we cannot but wonder whether the commissioners exaggerated a bit by implying that it had been completed at the time of their visit.

"It is true, as was noted earlier, that the weather was remarkably mild in February, and we have the statement of Daniel Cross that 'we all turned out and helped to build their homes.

"There is also evidence that Allen and Rumsey hired two or three men whom they had met in Detroit to work during the winter and spring of 1824. One was a printer named Timothy C. Strong from Palmyra, New York."

Strong, who returned to western New York in 1826, wrote to Allen in 1828 recalling his and Allen's "symultaneous espausal to that land" and "how we enjoyed together...the first fruits of Washtenaw." When Rumsey died in 1827, he still owed Strong $51.31.



"It was agreed by Allen and Rumsey that in planning their village, the east-west dividing line between their property would correspond to the principal street,

which they named Huron Street, with Allen's land on the north and Rumsey's on the south.

"They also agreed that the streets running north and south would be designated by ordinal numerals, although from the start Third Street was also designated as Main Street and was to be somewhat wider than any of the others.

"We can assume that each chose the names for those east-west streets lying on their own land. Rumsey chose Washington, Liberty, and Williams, the latter probably to honor his aged father back in Vermont.

"Allen remembered his wife, Ann Isabella Allen, in naming Ann Street, but there is a mystery regarding the Catherine in his life whom he honored next. He named the next street North—many years later it was changed to Kingsley.

Street names such as Jefferson, Division and Lawrence would be added later. Lots were staked out in varying size. On Rumsey's side they numbered 210, on Allen's, 228, for a total of 438.

"Because Allen was the larger land owner, it was he who complied with the commissioners' order to provide space for a future courthouse—the block that he donated remains today as the Courthouse Square."

Since it would not be on the market for settlers, Allen used it a couple of years as a garden.

"On his side of Huron Street, Rumsey designated an area for the promised 'gaol.' Somewhat smaller than the public square, the Jail Square faced Liberty Street, between Fourth and Fifth Streets (Avenues today). No jail was built during Rumsey's lifetime, however.

"The first priority for Allen and Rumsey, after platting their village, must surely have been the construction of housing for themselves. First attention was given to providing shelter for the Rumseys, doubtless out of consideration for Mary Ann.

"Harriet Noble recalled in her old age that when her husband and brother-in-law arrived in Ann Arbor, 'Mr. John Allen and Walker Rumsey with his wife and two men had been there some four or five weeks, had built a small house, moved into it the day my husband and his brother arrived, and were just enjoying their first meal, which the newcomers had the pleasure of enjoying.'

"It was described by John Geddes, who arrived in Ann Arbor on July 15, 1824, as a 'sort of frame, one story high.' In the course of the summer and fall, Rumsey added a log structure which was attached to the frame house, it was this addition that became his 'Washtenaw Coffee House' or as Dr. Benjamin Packard called it in 1825, Rumsey's 'pioneer hotel.'

"It stood at the southwest corner of the intersection of Huron (now West Huron) and First Street.

"John Geddes remembered that Allen's 'log block house, one story and a half high' still 'had no rafters nor roof on it when he arrived, and that John Allen was putting up in a tent.

Allen's house, later called "Bloody Corners" when his brother painted it red, stood on the northwest corner of North Main and West Huron. Long vacant, this lot will soon be occupied by the Kajoian Building.

"In a letter written by John Allen to an aunt in Ohio on February 20, 1825, he described his home as 'a small log House with but one room down and one upstairs (or ladder) rather with a good fireplace and cooking stove....' "

(To be continued in next issue, March 1986).

COUNTY HISTORIC COMMISSION ACTIVITIES OUTLINED

Diana Pratt, a local attorney, is president of the Washtenaw County Historic District Commission, which holds public meetings monthly.

Meetings for the next few months are scheduled at 7:30 p.m. the first Tuesday in the Planning Commission room, third floor, County Building.

Drew Nazarro is vice-president, Beverly Fish, secretary; and Nancy Snyder, treasurer. Other members are Sheldon Ginns, Dick Oltmanns and Barbara Wykes. Jay Snyder is liaison representative of the planning commission.

The commission is trying to get a county ordinance certified so it can share in federal money. Its survey of county buildings has been put on computer for ready reference.

Nancy Snyder heads WCHDC's oral history project. Oltmanns is in charge of site marking and welcomes suggestions of appropriate historic sites.

Marshall McLennan, former president, and head of Eastern Michigan University's historic preservation program, is preparing a "thematic nomination" of Greek Revival architecture in the county for the National Register, the first such nomination in the country.

1985-86 SCHEDULE WCHS MEETINGS

Thursday, November 14, 1985, 6:30 p.m., fall potluck, Christian Reformed Church on Broadway.

Sunday, December 8, 1985, 2:30 p.m. Clements Library, Christmas reception.

Sunday, March 9, 1986, 2:30 p.m.

Thursday, April 17, 1986, 7:30 p.m.

Wednesday, May 21, 1986, 6:30 p.m., spring potluck, annual meeting.

Saturday, June 14, 1986, annual tour.

Please note variety of days and times and mark your calendar.

Meetings at American Legion unless otherwise noted.

Should Washtenaw County Historical Society appoint a museum/office/home committee to actively explore possibilities and propose a plan?

☐ **Yes** ☐ **No**

Comments _____

_____

Name (optional) _____

Please clip and send to WCHS, c/o Kempf House, 312 South Division, Ann Arbor, MI 48104, or bring to November 14 meeting.

HISTORICAL HAPPENINGS INVOLVE
BOOK PREMIERE, TOKENS, DOLLS, CHRISTMAS FESTIVITIES, LUMINARIA

Chelsea Historical Society: 7:30 p.m. November 11 at Crippen Building of Methodist Home. Election of officers.

Dexter Society: 6:30 p.m. Thursday, November 21, family potluck supper and tree trimming at museum, 3443 Inverness. Christmas bazaar 10-4 p.m. Saturday, December 7, at museum. Christmas sing, 7 p.m. December 14 at museum.

The Society hopes to light up the whole village Christmas eve with its luminary project (candles anchored in sand inside bags outdoors).

Manchester Society: 7:30 p.m. November 18 at Blacksmith Shop, 324 East Main. Mrs. Marie Johnson of Clinton will talk about her collection of tokens dating from the Civil War to the present.

President Howard Parr and his wife will have an open house at their Victorian home December 16 and the Society will again sponsor a Christmas eve luminary project.

Milan Society: Meets 7:30 p.m. third Wednesday (November 20) except December Christmas potluck (18th) begins at 6:30 p.m. at Hack House, 775 County Street.

'WHAT IS IT?' GAME AVAILABLE TO SCHOOLS

WCHS offers a traveling exhibit of small artifacts set up as a humorous "What is it?" game for children to schools.

It is available for school classes, subject to time and volunteer availability. For information call Patricia Austin, 663-5281.

Those attending are asked to donate some type of Christmas decoration for the house.

Northfield Society: 7:30 p.m. Thursday, December 5, place to be announced. Potluck supper. New history book to be introduced, entitled *Looking Back: History of Northfield Township and Whitmore Lake Area.* Call 665-8077 evenings for place.

Salem Society: Meets 7 p.m. last Thursday of month at Salem Elementary School.

Webster Society: 7:45 p.m. Monday, December 2. Christmas program and party at home of Jack and Gloria Brigham, 5199 Webster Church Road.

Annual meeting, 7:45 p.m. Monday, January 6, at Jim and Barbara Parker's, 6225 Webster Church Road. Tour of Jim's library of old books.

A genealogist will speak on how to trace a family tree at the February 3 meeting at 7:45 p.m. at Webster Community Hall.

Ypsilanti Society: Button exhibit delayed until after the holidays. Dolls on display until museum is decorated for Christmas December 12-13. Museum, 220 North Huron, open 2-4 p.m. Friday-Sunday.

Editor: Alice Ziegler, 663-8826
Mailing: Lucy Kooperman, 668-7174
Published September-May except January and February.

The Washtenaw County Historical Society
cordially invites you to an afternoon of

~Christmas Cheer~

Sunday, December 8, 1985
2:30~4:30 p.m.
William L. Clements Library
909 South University

WASHTENAW COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY MEETING

6:30 P.M. THURSDAY NOVEMBER 14, 1985

Christian Reformed Church
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Ann Arbor, Michigan

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